

## **Summary of the Meeting of the Steering Group of the Friends of Water** **New York, 11 May 2012**

On 11 May 2012, the Steering Group of the Friends of Water for Rio +20 held their final meeting at the Permanent Mission of Hungary to the United Nations to present the findings of the five thematic discussions that the Group held during the spring of 2012. The meetings were organized with the goal to bring added value to the sustainable development discussions through pragmatic and result-oriented approaches.

Participants included Ambassadors from several Member States as well as Dr. Zoltan Illes, Hungary's Minister of State for Environmental Protection, Nature Conservation and Water Management. Mr. Lenni Montiel, Director for Economic, Social and Development Affairs, Executive Office of the Secretary-General who delivered a speech on behalf of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

**H.E. Ambassador Csaba Korösi, Permanent Representative of Hungary** gave welcoming remarks and opened the session which was moderated by **Ms Nina Nordström, Minister Counsellor from Finland**.

In his remarks, **on behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Lenni Montiel** reminded participants that more than 1 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water and 2.5 billion people continue to live without access to basic sanitation. He encouraged Member States and the Steering Group to continue to collaborate with UN-Water in advocating for and implementing sound policies for integrated water resources management as well as to keep issues pertaining to water on the agenda at the highest levels of Government. There must be a particular focus on the hard-to-reach pockets of society, particularly rural populations, he stated. The Secretary-General's message concluded by giving full support and advocating for a global initiative to provide universal access to safe drinking water by 2030, to improve wastewater management, and to increase the efficiency of water use in agriculture, energy and industry.

**H.E. Ambassador Jarmo Viinanen, Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations**, gave a summary of the meeting of the Steering Committee which was hosted by the Permanent Mission of Finland on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2012. He underscored that the meeting outcome called for the integration of water into all sectors. He stated that governments, private sector and civil society needed to work more closely together to come up with sustainable solutions. He concluded that "real life" solutions to the problems of water for sustainable development must come from the private sector and civil society.

**H.E. Ambassador Sirodjidin Aslov, Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations**, stressed that the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2012, held by the steering committee and hosted by the Permanent Mission of Tajikistan, provided indispensable input on water as part of the green economy. He stated that access to water lifts people out of poverty in many ways as it can lead to among other things, increases in investment, creating green jobs, more efficient planning, changes in agricultural use, etc. He noted that industry can play a role in consumption and production patterns and further emphasized that cities play a central role in a green economy. With regard to freshwater ecosystem services, he pointed out that this was an essential supporter to fisheries, nutrients, etc. Ambassador Aslov underlined that those people living in disaster prone areas are disproportionately

affected by water abundance and water scarcity. He stressed that a system of integration is necessary. Ambassador Aslov concluded that international achievement of both new and already agreed goals including IWRM will require a significant amount of political will on the part of Member States and Governments.

**H. E. Ambassador Jakkrit Srivali, Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations**, stated that Thailand experiences problems with water; either too much or too little. He pointed out that the floods in 2011 contributed to a significant decrease in the overall GDP of Thailand, and has proven particularly difficult for the country as a whole. He added that Thailand has been working with IWRM for decades notwithstanding the difficulties in getting people to work in an integrated manner. He stressed that there was a need for greater coordination and that appropriate and sufficient financial and legal mechanisms are necessary in this regard.

**Dr. Zoltan Illes, Hungary's Minister of State for Environmental Protection, Nature Conservation and Water Management** underlined that water issues are important to all countries. He stated that the group of friends for water can be expanded to include more representatives from other nations. Citing national experiences and examples, he emphasized that the importance of sanitation issues should not be underscored. Access to water and sanitation should be inseparable, he stated. H.E. Illes also gave mention to other sectoral issues of importance to water for sustainable development, such as migration. He noted that in 2025 a huge percentage of the world will be living under water stress. He stated that individual approaches are very important but oftentimes inefficient citing the preference of consumers to purchase plastic bottles rather than using tap water.

He underscored the need for education and cooperation at all levels and further stressed the importance of local initiatives, he stated that action at the local level is a step toward having further action on a global level.

He further presented the 10 Recommendations or the "10 Commandments" from the Group of the Friends of Water.

Minister Zoltan Illes mentioned that he had been in contact with Mr Brice Lalonde, Executive Coordinator of Rio+20, regarding the new goal(s) on water which could be adopted by member States at/or after Rio. He also expressed Hungary's interest to organize, in 2013, a UN World Conference on Water to finalize the definition of these goals.

Following the presentation by Minister Zoltan, **Ms. Kenza Kaouakib-Robinson, Secretary UN-Water**, stressed the importance of the integrated management of water resources and the need to empower local authorities and municipalities who are effectively responsible for delivering the services. Referring to water scarcity and water as a finite resource, she stressed the importance of education and awareness on all issues of water.

Ms Kenza Kaouakib-Robinson also spoke of the importance of coordination and coherence especially in a system that can become fragmented. She underlined the importance of a mechanism that was able to bring together and coordinate the work of 30 UN members and 26 important stakeholders on issues pertaining to water and sanitation to deliver "as one". Within this context, she reminded the audience of UN-Water key messages for Rio as well as potential actions in support of green economic approaches which reflect the collective opinion of the UN-Water members. Finally, Ms Kaouakib-Robinson extended an invitation to all to participate in the UN-Water day in Rio on 19 June 2012 and expressed the hope that collaboration between UN-Water and UN member States continues beyond Rio.

During Q&A, the **Ambassador from Denmark and Deputy Permanent Representative, Erik Laursen**, stressed that we need to work beyond processes and have concrete actions that take into account all three dimensions of sustainable development. He emphasized that Denmark, as the head of the EU delegation, is keen to have goals and targets on water.

**The Ambassador of Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations, H.E. Dr. Zahir Tanin** stated that the Group's "*Ten Commandments*" were useful for those countries that already have water, but not so much for countries that are under water stress. He stressed that water scarcity leads to conflict in Afghanistan and is already exacerbating efforts to curtail the already ensuing violence that is taking place. He stressed that the issue of least developed countries (LDCs) is important and must be taken into account. Capacity building for those LDCs is also essential.

**The Ambassador of Iceland, H.E. Gréta Gunnarsdóttir**, stated that access to WATSAN as a human right is a top priority for Iceland.

**The Ambassador of Japan, H.E. Kazuo Kodoma**, stated that the connection of water and disasters is a very important issue and a high priority for Japan.